



Akademik Eğitim ve Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi (AJESS Journal)

Literary Translation between the Translational Act and the Reading Act

Bendaoud Mebrouk, Faculty of Arts and Languages, Department of Arabic Language and Literature,
Amar Telidji University, Laghouat, Algeria.
mebroukzeid@gmail.com

Article History

Received: 31/07/2026; Accepted: 24/09/2026; Published: 05/10/2026

Abstract:

There is no doubt that translation is one of the means through which sciences and knowledge are transmitted. However, the person undertaking the translation process often encounters a number of difficulties, particularly those related, on the one hand, to the translational act and, on the other, to the reading act. This requires the translator to be more aware of his responsibility towards texts, especially literary ones, and to strive to preserve their integrity and convey them faithfully, without either influencing or being influenced by them. This article therefore seeks to examine the foundations of the translational act and the reading act, as well as what is required of the translator in the course of carrying out the translation process.

Keywords: literary translation, translational act, reading act, translator.

Introduction:

Throughout history, most human experiences have sought to facilitate communication and interaction between individuals and societies. This has indeed been achieved at the technological level through the invention of numerous means of communication developed over the ages. The latest achievement of humanity in the field of communication is the Internet, through which the world has become merely a screen at our fingertips.

However, the remaining problem concerns the extent to which the intellectual and cognitive content conveyed in multiple languages through the communication media available on the Internet can be fully comprehended. This has led individuals to turn to translation in order to decode various texts, particularly literary ones. Here, the translator finds himself confronted with a number of challenges imposed by the nature of the texts themselves, as well as by the mechanism of translation, which is essentially represented in the translational act and the reading act. These two acts emerge through engagement with texts and through the attempt to translate them from the source language into the target language.

The translator thus finds himself practicing both acts while being required to preserve that fine line separating them. When translating, he must preserve fidelity; when reading, he must preserve the essence of the translation. Hence, we ask: How do these two acts manifest themselves in the translation process? To what extent can the translator embody them in the process of translation? In response to these questions, we will address the following points:

Translation

Literary Translation

The Translational Act through: fidelity, metaphor, and borrowing.

The Reading Act through: reception and interpretation.

1. Translation:

Translation is a human activity, and it has existed since ancient times as a means of communication among human beings. Clay tablets have been found at Tell el-Amarna, in the city of Minya, in the region that includes the city of Akhetaten. They were written in Akkadian using cuneiform script and came to Egypt in the fifteenth century from Babylon, Assyria, and the Greek islands. Egypt used to respond to correspondence in Akkadian as early as the third millennium BC.

i

Thus, the transmission of knowledge, news, and various sciences requires a language, and accepting, responding to, and interacting with such knowledge can only be achieved through its translation. When we refer to the Akkadian language, cuneiform script, Babylon, Assyria, and ancient Egypt, the existence of translation at that time is evidence of its antiquity. One scholar has summarized the motives that lead us to resort to translation as follows: "We resorted to

translation in order to discover a culture or acquire a particular field of knowledge. We also resorted to it to disseminate philosophical ideas or political systems, or to defend them. Translation has been employed for the development of national languages, or to introduce an author or simply out of admiration for him. It may also be a pseudo-translation, whereby the label of translation is attached to works that are, in fact, original. It may also be used to develop sciences and technologies. We translate for many and varied reasons. Translation has always been all of these things at once: it is a weapon and a means, and it performs a task.”ⁱⁱⁱ

These motives, taken together, define the purpose of translation for us. In light of this, translation may be defined as: The transfer of words, meanings, and styles on the basis of equivalence. It takes three forms:

Intralingual translation: in which reformulation takes place, whereby each word is translated according to what it is intended to convey.

Interlingual translation: which is translation in its commonly understood sense.

Intersemiotic translation: which involves interpreting linguistic signs through systems of non-linguistic signs.ⁱⁱⁱ

Through this multiplicity, translation occupies an important position in the field of knowledge in general. Through it, words are given other forms and move to live in an environment different from the one in which they were originally created.

2. Literary Translation:

Blanchot argues that a text possesses a certain kind of dynamism and a desire to move beyond itself, to change its home and transform its language. Perhaps this is a characteristic of literary works: they are texts in which language reveals the possibilities it holds for the future; they are texts in which language discloses its aspiration to move beyond itself. We may therefore say that translation makes use of this dynamism and exploits this aspiration, or, rather, puts it to work.^{iv}

Since the basis of this transformation and dynamism lies in exploiting the possibilities of language, this process cannot be an easy one, and its difficulties are inevitably transferred to translation as well. Accordingly, literary translation may be said to be extremely difficult, since the literary text is characterized by figurative language and deviation, which may render linguistic equivalence incapable of conveying the intended meaning in translation.

Literary translation can therefore be defined as the translation of literature in its various branches, or what are commonly referred to as different literary genres, such as poetry and other literary forms, through the transformation of one linguistic code—that is, a set of signs—into another. The meaning intended to be conveyed may be purely referential (*référentiel*), or it may be literary and contain rhetorical elements,^v thereby opening the way to multiple readings and interpretations.

1-2. The Translational Act:

The translator's field of activity is a vast world that brings together the transformation of a work and its reception at the same time. The aesthetics of translation are closely linked to the act of transforming a creative work, receiving it, and producing another form of reception. None of this can be achieved without possessing a competence founded upon four areas of skills: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence.

The aesthetic value of the first competence lies in the ability to analyze and synthesize, that is, to encode and decode. The second consists in understanding language within its actual context. The third derives from the ability to construct the unity of form and content in the production of spoken and written texts through cohesion, coherence, and textual connectedness, and to transfer them to the level of communication. Strategic competence, meanwhile, is manifested in the actual practice of the profession, that is, in mastering the aesthetics of communication, improving the transmission of meaning, and compensating for the rupture with the original caused by deficiencies in linguistic competence. In this way, the reasonableness of translation can be achieved through communicative acts at a high artistic level and with an acceptable degree of reception.^{vi}

These are the competences with which the translator must be equipped when undertaking the translation of a literary text. In addition, the translator must be familiar with the author's own language and the nature of his writing style, his intellectual and aesthetic references, the literary genre and historical period to which he belongs, and so forth. He must also be familiar with the non-linguistic reality to which the translated text belongs, the broader civilizational and cultural environment, the particular way in which that language segments and represents this reality, as well as the various characteristics and references of that language and the prevailing artistic taste at the time of the text. These characteristics constitute dimensions of which the text is only one possible manifestation.^{vii}

Despite all these conditions and all that is required of the translator, the danger of betrayal remains ever-present, making him responsible for preserving....

2-2. Fidelity:

Fidelity has always been associated with the necessity of assuming responsibility. Various legal and religious systems have emphasized it and established ethical and legal rules governing it. In the field of translation, fidelity is based on faithfulness to the original text, according to Cicero, who addressed the concept of fidelity on the basis of his experience in translating Greek speeches. He distinguished between fidelity and literal translation, stating: “I did not translate these speeches as a translator, but as an orator; I preserved the same forms of thought. Therefore, I did not render every word with an equivalent word, but preserved the general style and the force of the language...” For him, fidelity therefore means faithfulness to the original text.^{viii}

Accordingly, the translator must be familiar with the environment of the text and the circumstances that led to its production, as well as being acquainted with the various linguistic styles specific to the source language.

Schleiermacher, for his part, developed his conception of faithful translation on the basis of two paths, with no third option available to the faithful translator: either the translator moves away from the author of the text in order to bring the reader of the translation closer to the author, or moves away from the reader in order to bring the author closer to the reader of the translation. It has generally been argued that fidelity is achieved by following the first path.^{ix}

Thus, the translator assumes responsibility for being faithful to the text, the author, and the recipient alike, which requires him to possess:

1. Linguistic knowledge and the ability to grasp meaning.
2. Fidelity to the intentions of the text.
3. Fidelity to the Author's Thought.^x

These three principles constitute essential conditions, as they bring together the two most important elements that must be present in the translator. The first is knowledge of the language and everything pertaining to it in terms of structures, styles, forms, and terminology. The second is fidelity to the author's thought, since the author is the source of the text and of the ideas it contains.

3-2. Borrowing:

All languages are characterized by the tendency to borrow certain linguistic elements from other languages. This usually takes the form of transferring a term from the source language into the target language without translating it. The term is generally incorporated into the linguistic system of the target language. Thus, metaphor or borrowing is subject to the degree of flexibility and capacity characteristic of the target language, that is, its ability to accommodate certain terms. Arabic provides examples of this phenomenon through the transfer of certain terms from their original sources, such as "democracy", "protocol", and so forth.

Accordingly, borrowing is one of the most important foundations of the translational act, since it does not primarily take stylistic considerations into account, but rather considers the linguistic system as a whole. It may not produce a particular meaning in the receiving language, which makes it a direct technique essentially concerned with transferring foreign terminology. In Arabic, its corresponding process is known as "Arabization".^{xi}

Borrowing in the present era can be regarded as a consequence of the rapid changes experienced by certain societies in various fields, whether social, cultural, political, and so forth. This has caused certain terms to impose themselves upon the reality of a language. When such terms are transferred into other languages, they may have no equivalent, compelling specialists to retain them in their original form and employ them in contexts similar to those in which they appeared in the source language.

Fedorov considers translation through borrowing to be, in some cases, the only solution available to the translator when transferring proper names, names of countries, newspapers, and street names. Newmark supported this view and expanded the discussion of borrowing in his book 'Approaches to Translation', examining the various types of usage associated with this technique.^{xii}

Translation through metaphor or borrowing has imposed itself upon all languages. This reveals the existence of gaps within different linguistic systems, lexical deficiencies, and cultural and social expansion, which contribute to the circulation and widespread use of certain terms. This requires the translator to remain constantly prepared to identify such terms, while being aware of the circumstances surrounding their emergence and circulation, so that he can perform the translational act with the necessary competence.

3. The Reading Act:

Reception theory has demonstrated that reading constitutes an interaction between the reader and the text, and that it is a necessary condition for the process of meaning production. Without reading, the text cannot fully achieve its existence. The text acquires its reality only when it is read within the conditions of actualization that the text itself is supposed to carry, where the reconstruction of meaning takes place on the part of the other.^{xiii}

Since the translator is also a reader, the reading act brings together:

3-1. Reception:

This term encompasses two dimensions at once, a passive and an active one. It is a two-sided process: one side concerns the effect produced by the work upon the reader, while the other concerns the way in which the reader receives the work or responds to it.^{xiv}

In other words, the effect is an event that can be observed in the recipient through the interaction between the recipient and the text. In translation, theorists have associated the success of the translator's work with the achievement of a correspondence between the responses of the reader of the original and those of the reader of the translation. Interpretive theory, the Higher School of Translation, and translators have likewise established the same conception of reception. The role of translation has consequently come to be understood not merely as transferring meaning from the original text to the receiving text, but as reproducing the same cognitive and emotional effect in the recipient.

Thus, the translator plays the role of the reader in translation according to Berman, while the recipient, according to Jauss, plays a dynamic role in establishing this bridge between the past and the present of the text.^{xv} His role is therefore no longer confined to translating texts literally and receiving and consuming those texts in their entirety. Rather, his observations, judgments, and evaluations have acquired significance and a role in shaping meanings for the recipient.

In order to avoid any infringement upon the author's rights, the translator is required to place himself in a position below that of the author, a position that differs from that of the reader, who is capable of deconstructing the various components of the text. Such freedom is not granted to the translator. Accordingly, the translator must avoid becoming immersed in or dissolving himself into the text, or sympathizing with it, as this may lead him to fill certain gaps and consequently place the recipient of the translated text before certain fallacies and additions, leading the recipient to

approach them under the influence not of the effectiveness of the texts themselves, but rather of the act performed by the translator.

2-3. Interpretation:

Since translation is subject to experience, it is an act achieved through interpretation. Translation, by its very nature, is therefore an experience in which the translator confronts various oppositions: the opposition between the differences and similarities of languages; the opposition between their translatability and untranslatability; and the opposition between recovering meaning and reproducing form.

This reflection upon the translational experience is based on an interpretation justified by the translator's positive and negative ethical attitudes, represented respectively by fidelity and recognition of the Other, or by betrayal and the erasure of the Other's traces.^{xvi}

The success of the experience thus depends on subjective, extratextual factors related to the translator himself. This is supported by interpretive theory and literary hermeneutics, which regard the existence of a genuinely fixed methodology as impossible. Consequently, they do not propose ready-made formulas that can be mechanically applied. Rather, they view reading as an art that depends upon the talent, experience, and culture of the individual analyst.

This is the approach emphasized by Umberto Eco, who is primarily concerned with the semantic process of the text by teaching the reader how to engage with the text and merge with it in order to overcome its inertia and begin producing parallel meanings.^{xvii}

Accordingly, the concept of interpretation defines the translator's function between understanding and making oneself understood. Or, according to Danica Seleskovitch and Marianne Lederer in their book 'Interpretation and Translation', it is a continuous struggle of ideas aimed at reaching the author's intention in saying what he says and attempting to make the reader understand it.^{xviii}

In addition to the competence that the translator must possess, interpretation must also take into consideration the temporal distance or the historicity of the text's reception. Any movement from one language to another necessarily entails a contextual reformulation. As a general rule, it may be accepted that the more the source language and the target language belong to two different cultural worlds, the more some of the generic features of the original text are threatened with losing their function in the target text and becoming associated with generic classifications that are inappropriate to the original text.^{xix}

Conclusion:

Despite the difficulties surrounding the translator's task, it remains a noble one, deriving its value from its purpose, namely, the transmission of knowledge and sciences. However, the translator is required to adhere to fidelity and preserve it, broaden his linguistic knowledge, and develop his artistic sensibility so that he may engage with texts and come closer to them. He must also ensure that, once translated, they are adapted to their new context while preserving their original character and remaining compatible with the horizon of expectations of their recipients, without becoming immersed in or dissolving himself into them during the process of interpretation, which sometimes imposes itself upon the translator and consequently places him at risk of betraying his commitment to fidelity.

Although Jacques Derrida proudly states of translation: "How ugly texts are without translation..." it is the richness and growth achieved through the practice of translation that makes these texts beautiful, imbued with the aesthetics of conception and translational creativity.^{xx}

List of Sources and References:

Books:

1. Bouazza, Mohamed: *The Strategy of Interpretation: From Textuality to Deconstruction*, Éditions El-Ikhtilef, Algeria, 1st ed., 2011.
2. Cherchar, Abdelkader: *The Theory of Reading and the Reception of the Literary Text between the Arab Concept and the Modern Western Concept*.
3. Anani, Mohamed: *Literary Translation: Between Theory and Practice*, Longman International Publishing Company, Egypt, 2nd ed.
4. Kahil, Saïda Ammar: *Translation Studies*, Dar Majdalawi for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan, 2012.
5. Al-Kadya, El Djilali: "Translation between Hermeneutics and Reception Theory," in *Translation and Interpretation*, collective volume, Publications of the Faculty of Letters, Rabat, 1995.
6. Hans Robert Jauss: *The Aesthetics of Reception: Towards a New Interpretation of the Literary Text*, translated by Rachid Benhadou, Dafaf Publications, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 2016.
7. Siouffi, Gilles; Van Raemdonck, Dan: *100 Questions on Linguistics*, Bréal, Rosny, France, 1999, p. 170.
8. Mathieu Guidère: *Introduction to Translation Studies: Thinking about Translation. Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*, Louvain-la-Neuve, De Boeck Supérieur, 1st ed., 2016, p. 07.

Journals:

1. Ben Abdelali, Abdessalam: "The Task of Translation, the Task of Thought," 'Alamat Journal', No. 34, Vol. 14, December 2004.
2. Omari, Ibrahim: "Translation and Anthropology," 'Alamat Journal', No. 59, Vol. 15, March 2006.

ⁱ Gilles Siouffi, Dan Van Raemdonck, *100 Fiches: Comprend la linguistique*, Bréal, Rosny, France, 1999, p. 170.

ⁱⁱ Mathieu Guidère, *Introduction à la Traductologie: Penser la traduction. Hier, aujourd'hui, demain*, Louvain-la-Neuve, De Boeck Supérieur, 1st ed., 2016, p. 07.

-
- iii Saïda Ammar Kahil, *Translation Studies*, Dar Majdalawi for Publishing and Distribution, Amman, Jordan, 1st ed., 2012.
- iv Abdessalam Ben Abdelali, "The Task of Translation, the Task of Thought," *Alamat Journal*, No. 54, Vol. 14, December.
- v Mohamed Anani, *Literary Translation: Between Theory and Practice*, International Publishing Company, Longman, Egypt, p. 07.
- vi Saïda Ammar Kahil, op. cit., pp. 194–195.
- vii Ibrahim Omari, "Translation and Anthropology," *Alamat Journal*, No. 99, Vol. 15, March 2006, p. 42.
- viii Saïda Ammar Kahil, op. cit., p. 26.
- ix *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- x *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- xi Saïda Ammar Kahil, op. cit., p. 29.
- xii *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- xiii Mohamed Bouazza, *The Strategy of Interpretation: From Textuality to Deconstruction*, Éditions El-Ikhtilef, Algeria, 1st ed., 2011, p. 43.
- xiv Hans Robert Jauss, *The Aesthetics of Reception: Towards a New Interpretation of the Literary Text*, trans. Rachid Benhadou, Dafaf Publications, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st ed., 2016, p. 110.
- xv El Djilali El-Kadya, "Translation between Hermeneutics and Reception Theory," in *Translation and Interpretation*, collective volume, Publications of the Faculty of Letters, Rabat, 1995, p. 58.
- xvi Saïda Ammar Kahil, op. cit., p. 13.
- xvii Abdelkader Cherchar, *The Theory of Reading and the Reception of the Literary Text between the Arab Concept and the Modern Western Concept*, p. 117.
- xviii Saïda Ammar Kahil, op. cit., p. 84.
- xix Mohamed Bouazza, *The Strategy of Interpretation: From Textuality to Deconstruction*, p. 52.
- xx Saïda Ammar Kahil, *Translation Studies*, p. 94.